Possession

possession. 1. the action or fact of possessing, or the condition of being possessed. 2. the holding or having of something as one's own, or being inhabited and controlled by a demon or spirit.

One day I was taking a nap. I woke up and stared at the wall: still sort of dreaming. Written up there between the window and the wall were the words, "This is the death of the last negro man in the whole entire world." Written up there in black vapor. I said to myself, "You should write that down," so I went over to my desk and wrote it down. Those words and my reaction to them became a play.

Writing I dance around spinning around to "get out of the way" like Zen sort of, the self simultaneously disappears *his bones cannot be found* and is revealed. The definition of possession cancels itself out. The relationship between possessor and possessed is, like ownership is, multidirectional.

the plays should have the half-life of plutonium

The leap demanded that I commit myself to the clear impossibility of becoming a writer, and attempting to save my family that way.

—James Baldwin

Who do I write for? To answer "myself" begets another question; that is, "Who am I?" If I answered that "I write for the audience," I would be lying. I write for the figures in the plays:

CHONA, MONA, VERONA, MRS. SAXON, MRS.

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SMITH, BUFFY & MUFFY & DUFFY, KIN-SEER, SHARK-SEER, US-SEER, SOUL-SEER, OVER-SEER, DARLY & JUNIOR, LILY, ODELIA & GEORGE, LUCI & MARE, HAM, PRUNES AND PRISMS, QUEEN-THEN-PHARAOH, BLACK MAN WITH WATER-MELON, BLACK WOMAN WITH FRIED DRUMSTICK, LOTS OF GREASE AND LOTS OF PORK, YES AND GREENS BLACK-EYED PEAS CORNBREAD, BEFORE COLUMBUS, VENUS, THE NEGRO RESURRECTIONIST, THE CHORUS OF THE LOVELORN THRONG, THE FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN & LUCY & BRAZIL.

Theatre is the place which best allows me to figure out how the world works. What's going on here. So much of the discussion today in literary criticism by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and others concerns how the African-American literary contribution should be incorporated into the canon. The history of Literature is in question. And the history of History is in question too. A play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history through the medium of literature. Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre, for me, is the perfect place to "make" history—that is, because so much of African-American history has been

as a child I wanted to do something great like become a go-go dancer or a geologist or ascend into heaven.

unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as playwright is to–through literature and the special strange relationship between theatre and real–life—locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down.

The bones tell us what was, is, will be; and because their song is a play—something that through a production *actually happens*—I'm working theatre like an incubator to create "new" historical

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events. I'm re-membering and staging historical events which, through their happening on stage, are ripe for inclusion in the canon of history. Theatre is an incubator for the creation of historical events—and, as in the case of artificial insemination, the baby is no less human.

A person dies and yet continues to live: he is a living-dead, and no other term can describe him better than that. . . . The living dead are bilingual . . . and speak in nasal tones. They belong to the time period of the Zamani [past] and by entering individuals in the Sasa [present] period, they become our contemporaries. The state of possession and mediumship is one of contemporarizing the

tially beyond the horizon of present time.

—*John S. Mbiti,*
African Religions and Philosophy

memory
un-remembered
dis-membered
re-member
"his bones cannot
be found"
putting the body
back together

Through each line of text I'm rewriting the Time Line—creating history where it is and always was but has not yet been divined.

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